

The Guardian

Cleveland Cram obituary

Set a spy to catch a spy

By **Harold Jackson**

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In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson became so alarmed about the state of Britain's security services that he ordered a highly-secret official investigation of their relationship with America's own intelligence agencies.

His concern sprang from a series of disasters - the defection of Kim Philby, Sir Anthony Blunt's admission that he had been a Soviet agent, and MI5's covert investigation of its own chief and his deputy as suspected Soviet spies (these last two embarrassments only acknowledged 15 years later by Mrs Thatcher).

Two representatives of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board were covertly dispatched to London to carry out the inquiry. There they were met by the CIA's deputy chief of station, Cleveland Cram, who was responsible for his service's liaison with MI5 and MI6.

In this position Cram, who has died aged 81, had built up unprecedented access to both the British services. With no indication of why the two strangers had come (he simply introduced them as 'colleagues'), he took them on a tour of most of Britain's high-security intelligence establishments.

The visitors' subsequent report harshly criticised the two organisations' lack of resources and their poor administration. It commented that Sir Roger Hollis, head of MI5, had lost the confidence not only of his own staff but of other senior officials in Whitehall. More explosively, it recommended what amounted to an American takeover of British intelligence through a vastly increased CIA station in London, able to provide both American manpower and money. The existence of this highly-damaging document was leaked by the CIA's chief of counter-intelligence, James Angleton, to his close British friend and admirer, Peter Wright (later famous as the author of *Spycatcher*). Not surprisingly, when Wright came back to London and passed on the information, the Wilson government reacted violently. Cram was threatened with a reprisal unprecedented against an allied diplomat, of being declared *persona non grata*.

Tempers eventually cooled: Cram was quietly promoted to become CIA station chief in the Netherlands, and ended his career as the agency's chief in Canada. But he was left with a score to settle, and his opportunity came only a year after he had retired in 1975.

Angleton had been prised out of the agency in 1974 as part of a general re-organisation by its new director, William Colby. The counter-intelligence chief's convoluted paranoia about Soviet penetration had made him increasingly difficult to work with. In part these endless suspicions seemed to have been triggered by his earlier close friendship with Kim Philby and the shock of discovering that he too had been as easily deceived as everyone else.

This fixation about Soviet moles led, for example, to Angleton's rejection of the first overtures from Colonel Oleg Penkovsky, the Soviet military intelligence officer who eventually passed more high-grade information about Soviet capabilities and intentions than any other Western spy. Having been rejected by the CIA, Penkovsky was eventually recruited by MI6 but, even after the quality of his material had become evident, Angleton continued to dismiss him as a provocateur.

He reacted to his enforced retirement by embarking on a long-running feud with the CIA and its new leadership through widespread off-the-record briefings to journalists and authors. They were designed to highlight the agency's negligent assessment of the Soviet Union and the threat this posed to America's security. In many cases Angleton offered his own impenetrable analysis as proof that the CIA had been compromised by the KGB.

Under an increasing barrage of articles and books which accepted Angleton's spin on events, the agency decided to recall Cram from retirement to carry out a special investigation of Angleton's record over the two decades he had run its counter-intelligence section. It became immediately apparent that paranoia was not confined to Angleton. The CIA insisted that Cram must work in a secure vault within another secure vault at its headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

This was his office for the next six years, surrounded by thousands of files giving details of the agency's operations against the Soviet Union and the interrogation of defectors. Eventually 11 volumes of dense history emerged, which ripped Angleton's reputation to shreds. They remain highly-classified to this day, and the only clue to their content was given in a monograph Cram wrote in 1993 for the Centre for the Study of Intelligence.

'Angleton began to play off one writer against another,' he wrote, 'planting his ideas and opinions among them... In the summer of 1977 [he] developed a new forum for his ideas. He and like-minded associates organised the Security and Intelligence Fund to defend US security and intelligence organisations... The Fund remained in effect into the 1980s until, after Angleton's death [in 1987] and the coming of glasnost, it withered away.'

Cram was born in Waterville, Minnesota, and spent some time as a young graduate touring Europe as war clouds gathered over it. His further education at Harvard (studying Irish politics) was interrupted for naval service in the Pacific. After his graduation from Harvard he was recruited by the newly-formed CIA in 1950. His career concentrated principally on counter-intelligence operations in Britain and later as the CIA representative with the Nato Security Committee.

Margaret, his wife of 56 years, died in 1998, and he is survived by a daughter and grand-daughter.

Cleveland C Cram, intelligence officer, born December 21, 1917; died January 9, 1999

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